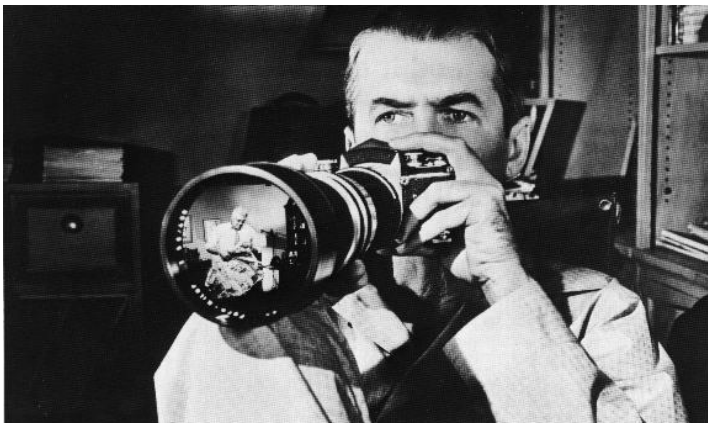
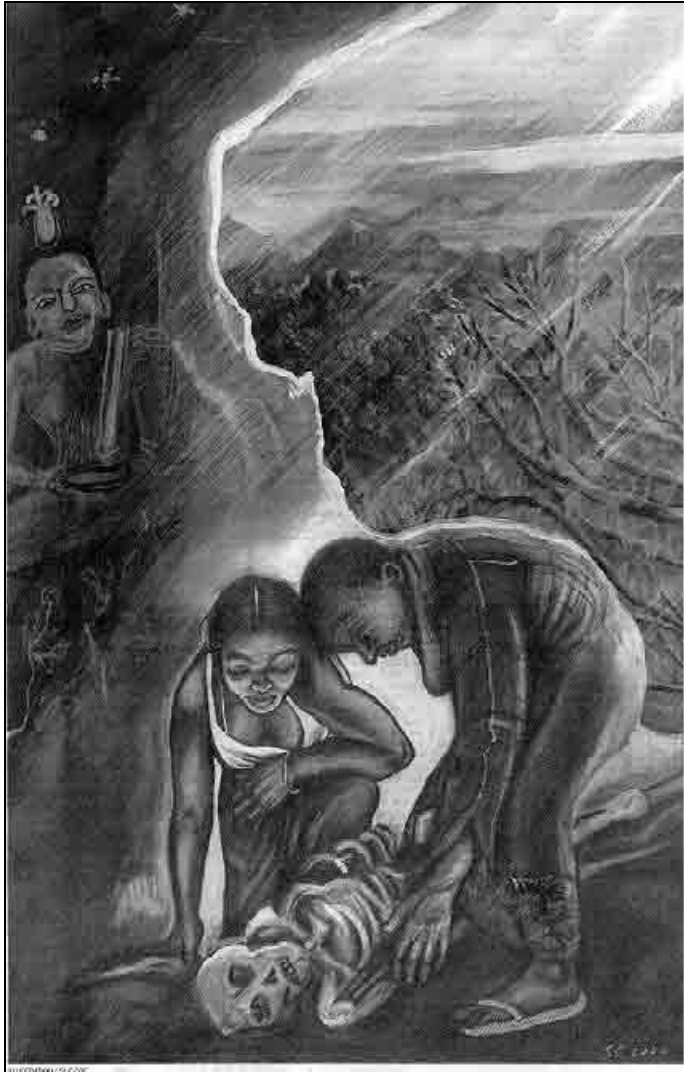


HSC Extension English:

Crime Writing



Approach to Module A: Genre

The Rubrics

1. “This module requires students to explore and evaluate **notions of genre**. It develops their understanding of the **conventions and values** associated with generic forms... Students consider the ways in which genres are **adapted to different times and cultures** and the attitudes and values reflected by these adaptations. They examine **why genres arise at particular times** and the **social and cultural conditions that are conducive to their endurance or recurrence in popularity**. Students consider the reasons for and validity of **generic distinctions**.”
 - This elective requires you to study **genre through the lens of crime writing**. Thus, you need to consider:
 - **The genre of the prescribed text and texts of own choosing**: Demonstrate an understanding of genre: the conventions, the stage your texts were composed in: embryonic, golden and refinement period, how and why genre evolves, regenerates and transforms itself through subversion, and evaluate how crime fiction texts usually reflect the times they are produced in. Consider the constants and differences and the values. Do not spend an inordinate amount of time detailing the historical development of the genre.
 - **The context**: The times, society, its culture and its values
 - **The endurance and popularity of crime writing**: Why audiences since the inception of the 'whodunit' murder mystery have been drawn to these texts.
 - **The vehicle**: The medium and form, the audience and purpose, setting, ideas, characterisation and the use of language.
2. “examine texts composed in a range of media that encompass and scrutinise a crime and its investigation” – definition of what is crime writing!
 - Consider how the media that is chosen impacts on the crafting of a text.
 - The focus is squarely on a crime and its investigation that has its roots in the traditional detective story.
3. “consider how crime writing has evolved by extending, reimagining and challenging the conventions of the traditional detective story... Some of the elements explored in the study of crime writing include how changing contexts and values have brought about changes in the traditional crime stories and resulted in new conventions, new understandings of what constitutes **a crime and who plays the role of detective and even what ‘justice’ means**.”
 - Consider what is constant and what is different about the **conventions** and **values** in the crime texts, and why this is so, based on your understanding of the times and values of the period the text is composed in.

The HSC

Line of Argument or Thesis

“well-integrated textual references and quotes in support of arguments” (2007 Notes from the Marking Centre).

When you are responding to examination questions that require you to discuss your prescribed texts and texts of own choosing, you must use the question to design a strong, clear and insightful thesis or line of argument. This thesis should then be developed and sustained through the exploration of your texts in your response. This enables your discussion of your

texts to be integrated and meaningful rather than chunked and unconnected analysis of your texts.

Suggestions

1. **Demonstrate an understanding of genre:** Employ a few key quotes or make references to genre theory and then apply them to your texts as evidence of research. The key word is “apply”, there is no use quoting if your understanding of genre theory is not reflected in your discussion of your texts. The NSW BOS 2007 *Notes from the Marking Centre* stated that better responses revealed “relevant understanding of literary theory, historical background and context” and in 2008, this was reiterated, “Genre theory was capably interwoven in the better responses.” E.g.
“Conan Doyle’s short story ‘The Five Orange Pips’ was written in 1887, in the embryonic age of the crime genre. If ‘A genre develops according to social conditions,’ as stated by Thwaites, then the conventions of the genre that are established by this text such as a sleuth, a detailed setting, a mystery and a crime to be solved, reflect the late Victorian era. In fact, it can be said that the crime genre immediately achieved popularity because the world and action of such stories reflected the values of their audiences. This link, between the values of a society and the methods and values of its crime solvers, has endured in crime writing ever since.

The society of the late 1800’s was confident in its industrial and imperial might. They valued science and rationality, believing that whatever crime threatened their society could be solved by rational means. John Cobb’s said of the time, “literate gentlemen could believe that order and reason could prevail over the forces of violence.” Thus the developing crime writing was as according to Sean McCann “a celebration of victory of public knowledge and civic solidarity over the dangers of public desires.”

The character of Sherlock Holmes in this way reflects his society. He is honest, intelligent and focused on restoring order and reason, overcoming crime easily using only a rational mind, and the tools of inference and deduction. As commented in the text through sharp, pragmatic sentences which establish a confident tone, “He said you could solve anything. That you are never beaten.” It is easy to see the audience’s value for this detective. A likable detective has become a convention of the crime genre, as composers feel it is important for responders to be able to relate to them. This can be seen in Anil’s Ghost.” Rosie

2. **Discuss the conventions of the text and how they reflect their times, values, attitudes and culture:** Remember that genres may evolve and differences emerge, but certain key conventions can remain constant:

Anil’s Ghost written in the 20th century, is set in the political turmoil of Sri Lanka. Abercrombie stated, “we may enjoy the stretching of a genre in new direction and the consequent shifting of our expectations.” Anil’s Ghost stretches the genre, as it uses the crime genre conventions to comment on and expose other issues. Sri Lanka, although a country, works as a conventionalised isolated setting in the same way as the urban streets in Rear Window and The Monkey’s Mask, as it is isolated by the government’s silence and the West’s indifference. Ondaatje deliberately establishes the setting as beautiful so when it contrasts with the image of overshadowing war and violence, “Heads on stakes” described using a blunt, fractured sentence, the destructiveness of war is heightened.” Rosanna

3. **Remember that the rubric focuses on crime writing:** Thus, you need to consider and analyse the use of language and the forces that have shaped and manipulated the crafting of a text:
 - **The medium of production:** Writing in the medium of a film script or a short story or a graphic novel will have a definite impact on the craft. The graphic novelist focuses on writing dialogue and stream of consciousness whereas the verse novelist could focus more on imagery and figurative devices. The film *Rear Window*, an adaptation of Cornell Woolrich's story 'It Had to be Murder', makes many changes to the original. The first person narrative is replaced by the camera lens that becomes an agent for our fears and desires.
 - **The sub-genre:** The chosen crime genre shapes the register and style of the text. A hard-boiled short story will feature short, sharp staccato lines, acerbic humour and symbolic use of chiaroscuro lighting.
 - **The context, culture and values:** The times, ideology and the context of a composer will influence the style of writing and the choice of language. *Rear Window* released in 1954 is controlled by the Hays Production Code that limited the violence, sex and the language. This is certainly not the case in the 2009 television show *Underbelly: The Tale of Two Cities* where the violence and sex scenes are gratuitous in places.

E.g.

Shinichiro Watanabe's 'A Detective Story' from the Animatrix suite gives tribute to the other main subgenre of crime fiction, 'hardboiled'. The 'hardboiled' subgenre is easily traced through the American western genre featuring a lone and flawed character, usually male, who is handy with a gun and quick at delivering the acerbic, one liners. In this modern anime, the hero is the female Trinity whose antagonist is Mr Ash, reflecting the changing times and the rise of feminism. She is positioned filmically in power areas all the way through her scenes as is exemplified in the key scene in the train cabin when she and Mr Ash first meet. Tight framing positions her in the top third of the frame, empowered through mise-en-scene by the large gun she holds to his head. Then the composer switches to a slightly askew bird's-eye-shot with some minor fish-eyeing so as to create a sense of danger in the scene, reinforced by the piercing blows from the high non-diegetic violin which only activates occasionally so as to accentuate the eerie silence in the scene. To add to Trinity's power the camera pans slowly around Mr. Ash clockwise, placing her more and more above him as the scene progresses." Reece

4. **Synthesise by comparing and contrasting the texts and discussing what you have learned about genre and crime writing through the texts:** Integration is the key to a sound response as it reveals insight and understanding of the demands of the course.
5. **Use a range of texts of your own choosing that you can compare and contrast with your prescribed texts, and enable you to reveal your understanding of the genre and crime writing.** E.g. Anil, Jeff, Cordelia and the detective from *Wire in the Blood* are flawed, resolute detectives. Account for the diversity, hybridity and subversion of the genre in contemporary times.
6. **FOCUS** on the set question as it must shape your response.

Genre

For this elective, you should be very clear in your own mind what characterises the genre: not only its conventions, but its place in various literary and historical contexts. Essentially, you will use your prescribed texts and your own related texts to illustrate what you understand and appreciate about genre and the craft of crime writing. The ‘2005 Feedback from the Marking Centre’ stated that: “The better responses demonstrated a strong intellectual grasp of the concepts of the genre...”

Conventions may change and be adapted according to the times, values, attitudes and culture. Thus *Rear Window* will embody different conventions to *Skull Beneath the Skin* owing to the difference in context of the two texts and their reflection of the social, cultural and moral worlds of these contexts. Use aberrant texts such as *Anil’s Ghost* and *The Real Inspector Hound* to demonstrate how the genre can be subverted by certain texts and explain why and how it is subverted. Discuss how the context of these texts could have instigated the changes.

According to genre theorists genres provide frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted, and that a genre can semiotically provide a shared code between the composers and responders of texts. Thus, a genre can frame the responder’s interpretation of a text, and shape expectations. Genres can initiate an unspoken agreement between composers and responders. According to Neale (1980) the key psychological function of genre is the reduction of complexity as they make texts more understandable, predictable and easy for the responder to fill in the gaps. “They allow a measure of control on the part of the reader creating a schema – a mental template – with which readers can make sense of related experiences in everyday life” (<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>). John Fiske sees genre as: “a means of constructing both the audience and the reading subject” (Fiske, 1987, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>). P.D. James affirms this assertion by stating that: “The detective story not only asserts the sanctity of life but supports our belief that we live in a moral and rational universe” (James, 2000).

Steve Neale states that: “genres are instances of repetition and difference...difference is absolutely essential to the economy of genre” (Neale, 1980). Neale argues that definitions of genre “are always historically relative, and therefore historically specific” (1995, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>). Genres reflect the times they are composed in; therefore, demonstrate understanding of the contexts of your composers and discuss how context shapes the genre, the values in the text and the actual writing of the text. Discuss the implicit and explicit values such as loyalty, mateship, closure, justice, honesty and integrity.

A genre embodies certain values and ideological assumptions. John Fiske asserts that generic conventions: “embody the crucial ideological concerns of the time in which they are popular” (Fiske, 1987, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>). However, Steve Neale stresses that genres may also help to shape such values (Neale, 1980). Thwaites *et al.* agree stating that: “a genre develops according to social conditions; transformations in genre and texts can influence and reinforce social conditions” (<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>). Bernadette Casey reports that: “recently, structuralists and feminist theorists, among others, have focused on the way in which generically defined structures may operate to construct particular ideologies and values, and to encourage reassuring and conservative interpretations of a given text” (Casey, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>). Marele Day, an Australian hard-boiled writer confirms Casey’s concerns. Day concludes that: “The hard-boiled detective story has a lot in common with the western—it is an adventure story rather than a puzzle to be solved, and there is plenty of action often erupting in violence. The hero knows his way around the traps because he

knows the place; this is the landscape of his quest, his scene of action. Man against man, man against his environment. A machismo paradise, not a good woman in sight” (Marele Day, ‘Bitch City’, p. 126).

Genre Quotes

- “Genre...kind, type, esp. a style or category of painting, novel, film etc. characterised by a particular form or purpose” (*The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 2004).
- “For readers, genres are sets of conventions and expectations: knowing whether we are reading a detective story, or a romance, a lyric poem or a tragedy, we are on the lookout for different things and make assumptions about what will be significant. Reading a detective story, we look for clues in a way we don’t when we are reading a tragedy” (Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory*, 1997).
- “Genres are like clichés – they might seem hackneyed but that is because they have recurrent value for many people over time” (Stephen Knight, *How to Write Crime*).
- “A genre that demands intelligence, imagination, and active involvement from its readers... The genre includes works of many kinds in which crime is central to the theme, action and especially plot structure of the narrative” (R. Herbert, *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, 1999).
- “Crime fiction is a genre with an origin in the development of urban society. In the cities, the detective was born to defend against some of the most alarming features of this new civilisation, and the early stories are full of questions of identity and threats about the darkness of the modern heart” (Stephen Knight, *How to Write Crime*).
- “One of the genre’s central features is the kind of light it sheds on particular cultures. The criminal act disrupts the social fabric, and the detective must use his unique investigative skills to sew it back together again. In the process, the skilful writer can reveal certain aspects of a culture that otherwise remain hidden, and this may be one reason the genre has increasingly proliferated into the representation of different national, regional, and ethnic cultures” (Cawelti, J.G.)
http://www.sp.uconn.edu/~jbl00001/English_109-23/mystery2.htm.
- “Thus, the mystery is a window into all types of societies — from the English country homes and its elite residents, to the mean urban streets of North America, to the awesome landscapes and cultures of the Navaho in the American Southwest. In short, the mystery is a veritable geographic bazaar with places to explore, things to learn and with an opportunity to be pleasantly entertained” (Demko,
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gjdemko/nyaag.htm>).
- “Every genre positions those who participate in a text of that kind” (Gunther Kress,
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>).
- “Genres offer an important way of framing texts which assists comprehension. Genre knowledge orientates competent readers of the genre towards appropriate attitudes, assumptions and expectations about a text which are useful in making sense of it. Indeed, one way of defining genres is as ‘a set of expectations’” (Neale 1980,
<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>).

Anil's Ghost

"The new novel hasn't so much raised the bar on the forensic thriller as moved it to another place entirely. He bends and stretches the novel into marvellous shapes, building cathedrals of story, mysterious and grand adventures of the everyday" ([www. Dave Weich.Powells.com](http://www.DaveWeich.Powells.com)).

The Form

This novel is a hybrid genre combining crime with a political, historical and social focus. Ondaatje has crafted a post-modern text that challenges the conventional form of the novel and the crime genre. Anil in her role as forensic scientist rationally and scientifically tries to unravel the mystery of sailor's identity (and her own identity), the cause of his death and the identity of the perpetrators. Solving the mystery of his death will, according to Anil, signal justice for numerous other victims.

The Writer

Michael Ondaatje was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1943. Of Tamil, Sinhalese and Dutch descent Ondaatje spent his early years on the Kutapitiya tea estate. His mother's gift was her enthusiasm for the arts - "She loved books and she loved theatre." His father was a difficult loner who died when Ondaatje was young - "My loss was that I never spoke to him as an adult. He is still one of those books we long to read whose pages remain uncut. He was a sad and mercurial figure. There was a lot I didn't know about him, and that was recurring in my books: trying to find the central character. It became a habit. In all my books there are mysteries that are not fully told."

The Writing

A writer uses a pen instead of a scalpel or a blow torch. As a writer one is busy with archaeology. It's what the writer does with any character. On one level you're moving forward, but on another, you're revealing the past (Ondaatje, www.bookpage.com).

Ondaatje's writing is poetic, lyrical and suggestive. He does intrude with political statements and insightful observations of life, art and people, often through the doctor Gamini, "Who sent a thirteen-year old to fight, and for what furious cause? For an old leader? For some pale flag?" (p. 220).

He uses understatement and omission to allow the reader to visualise the horror and tragedy of war, "The colour of a shirt. The sarong's pattern. The hour of disappearance" (p. 43). The vignettes in the novel convey tentatively the crimes that have occurred leaving so much to our imagination. Sarissa's story leaves so much untold, yet we can easily fill in the missing pieces and imagine what happened to her after she crossed the bridge and entered the village: "She keeps running forward, and then she sees no more" (p.175).

His structure is chaotic and non-linear and cinematic, employing flashbacks, jump cuts from one scene to another, fractured sentences, and so on. Ondaatje tries to reflect through his structure the unpredictable nature of life, especially in a country torn asunder by war and murder:

You can't enter my novel with any sureness of where you are going to go. You are going to have to go left, and then jag right again, and so forth Ondaatje.

The use of intertextuality, historical facts and actual place names adds authenticity and credibility to the text further evoking horror as the reader cannot ignore that the suffering actually happened.

When you have crime on such a large scale and so many players involved, it would be too limiting to rely on one narrator. Thus, Ondaatje employs polyphonic voices to convey the extent of the horror and madness, and to reveal that individuals still manage to survive with courage and stoicism:

You cannot rely on just Anil to tell the truth, or just Gamini, or just Sarath, or just Palipana, or just Ananda, or whoever it is, to have the only voice. Because everything is shaded: one person's tragedy is another person's comedy or not comedy but something else that is not that serious. So it seems to me that a novelist has somehow, either through various narrators or through suggestion or something else, or through juxtaposition or collage, to suggest the complexity of any moment. It's the morality of cubism in a way, to allow us to see the face four different ways simultaneously.
Ondaatje.

The Crime and the Context

I see the world as utterly dangerous, that it's a very tenuous, accidental world and what you love, especially the people you love, can be swept away in an instant
(Ondaatje - in interview with *The Guardian*).

In recent times, with the growth of countries and technology, interest has shifted from local crimes to national and international crimes. The Sri Lankan people have endured thousands of years of civil war, but the internecine war of the 1990's with the aid of the modern weapons of war was even more incomprehensible as it was a war being waged on three fronts by its own people against its own people. Ondaatje denies being political, but his authorial intrusions and the comments by his characters such as Sarath or Gamini are politically charged and damning. In the 21st century, the reader is all too aware of state crimes and the suffering caused by war. The attitude of the Sri Lankan people towards the crimes contrasts with Anil's attitude representing the west and our need for justice and closure.

Thus, the crime is unconventional and broad. There is the crime against humanity by people with a cause that is questionable - "The reason for war was war" (p. 43). The breadth of this crime and the impossibility of solving this crime or finding closure influences Anil to focus on one crime: the murder of Sailor. If she can solve who he is and murdered him then he would be a "representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest" (p.56).

The perpetrators are nebulous and many, and not brought to justice: "Every side was killing and hiding the evidence. *Every side*... So it's secret gangs and squads" (p. 17). Everyone to some extent is guilty whether it is through killing, indifference or silence, "Now we all have blood on our clothes" (p. 48). "We are often criminals in the eyes of the earth, not only for having committed crimes, but because we know that crimes have been committed" (p.54). "What is that quality in us? Do you think? That makes us cause our own rain and smoke?" (p. 138).

The Investigation

The investigation of the death of so many Sri Lankans is initiated by an international human rights group, but it is thwarted by government officials and those people who do not want the perpetrators exposed. Anil and Sarath use forensic science to investigate when and how the murders were committed.

Sailor becomes the symbolic victim, and it is the investigation of his death that renders Anil and Sarath vulnerable. Sarath becomes the victim of the government's drive to silence the stories and stop further investigations.

The Detective

In modern times, the female forensic sleuth has grown in popularity. Anil is independent, resolute, highly skilled, intelligent and strong, but even she cannot bring to justice the perpetrators of a crime that is too extensive and unstoppable. It is worth noting that she fought to have a male name, reinforcing Marele Day's assertion that crime fiction remains a male domain.

Anil fits the detective profile: she is a loner - her family is dead, she has discarded a husband and a lover; she is honorable and determined to solve the case and seek justice; she values truth and honesty – “We use the bone to search for it. ‘The truth shall set you free.’ I believe that.” (p. 102); she is flawed – she violently attacked her ex-lover Cullis; she avoids close relationships; and she is the lone pursuer of justice – although she has Sarath, as she cannot trust him. Her ex-lover Cullis says: ‘You are a complete stranger to me.’ (p. 35)

The Ideas

- **Truth:** “There are various versions of the truth.” Ondaatje explores public and private truth. Those in power own public truth; it can be shaped, twisted and distorted at will. Anil, like most Westerners values truth and justice, but Sarath who has witnessed the perversion of truth and the dangers of knowing the truth, values life. Life in Sri Lanka is about survival, not the pursuit of truth and justice, as the forces of evil are too powerful. Truth can even be dangerous, “it’s sometimes more dangerous here if you tell the truth” (p. 53). Anil’s understanding of truth is a western concept where truth is equated with facts, justice and closure:

The truth! One of the things I wanted to get at was that we in the West have a tradition of believing that there are always answers, always solutions. American foreign policy is based on that belief. You can bomb your way to victory if you want, or you can bomb your way to having your truth accepted in another country. I think that one of the important things that comes up in Asian writing is that sometimes you can have tragedy and light simultaneously, tragedy and almost comedy simultaneously. There's an odd kind of balance. It's a terrible thing to admit to or to accept, but there is an acceptance of it. Truth sometimes can be, you know, as dangerous as falseness (Ondaatje, 2001).

Ondaatje creates faction by blending fact and fiction - he employs names of actual victims, the death of the president and other significant facts.

- **Humanity's inhumanity:** The terrible, senseless internecine crimes are almost inexplicable. The evocative, disturbing images of Ananda's wife Sarissa walking to work, a common task she performed everyday, and witnessing the shocking desecration of the bodies of the teenagers; the man being taken away on a bicycle – “The blind-folded man had to balance his body in tune with his possible killer” (p.

155); the omissions such as the actual killing of Sarissa – “She keeps running forward, and then she sees more” (p. 175), and the knowledge that there can be no closure for Ananda as she is classified as missing disturb the reader. These crimes occurred in the 1990’s but as a reader in 2009 we cannot ignore the fact that these same crimes are being committed in too many countries; thus the novel will continue to have relevance and value. Ondaatje forces the reader to consider how all of humanity is guilty and capable of committing dark crimes - “We do it to ourselves” (p. 140)

- **The consequences of war:** In the 1990’s the Sri Lankans lived with fear and the expectation that they or their family could easily disappear: “*Yet the darkest Greek tragedies were innocent compared with what was happening here. Heads on stakes. Skeletons dug out of a cocoa pit in Matale*” (p. 11). Sadly, there is a stoic, quiet acceptance of this. Then there are those who resort to drugs to escape the horror, such as Gamini or those who try to take their lives like Ananda – “He’s just one of those who try to kill themselves because they lost people” (p. 198). The images of the villages and the make-shift hospitals where children are maimed clearly convey the tragic consequences of war – war’s innocent victims.
- **The apathy of the West:** Ondaatje, through Gamini, is critical of the west, particularly America, for ignoring what happened in Sri Lanka, “That’s enough reality for the West” (p. 286).
- **Courage and compassion:** The brief scenes where the doctors such as Linus Corea are kidnapped to work on the victims of war and then choose to stay and help, remind the reader of humanity’s capacity for courage and compassion.
- **Healing power of nature:** The beautiful images of nature are juxtaposed with the disconcerting images of suffering and death. When Anil and Sarath are at the Grove of Ascetics, the beauty of the place is palpable. It is incomprehensible that this inexplicable violence occurred in such a beautiful country. Anil immerses herself in nature when reality is too much to bear, “Anil spends much of her time here, under the tree bent like an Aeolian harp that throws a hundred variations of shadow textures onto the sandy earth.” (p. 201) Ananda also seeks solace in nature, “He could witness the smallest approach of a bird, every flick of its wing, or a hundred mile storm coming down off the mountains...” (p. 307)
- **The value and beauty of art and culture:** Art is a redemptive act that symbolises the wonder and skill of humanity, and like the romantics it is the one way to find truth. Ananda finds some solace in the painting of Buddha’s eyes. “[Sri Lanka’s culture] is not just a culture of death, it’s an intricate, subtle, and artistic culture. I wanted to celebrate it.” Ondaatje
- **Survival and adaptability:** People manage to live and cope despite the horror and the fear.
- **The importance of home:** Anil has returned to her birthplace, yet she is aware that she is an outsider and a westerner. Ondaatje knows what it is like to be estranged from your homeland. Living in Canada, he writes with bittersweet clarity about his country.
- **Danger of Ideology:** Gamini as a doctor who has spent countless hours trying to save lives, is cynically aware of the terrible consequences of strong ideology when people believe what they are doing is right and that war justifies the end result, “He turned away from every person who stood up for a war. Or the principle of one’s land, or pride or ownership, or even personal rights. All of those motives ended up somehow in the arms of careless power. One was no better no worse than the enemy.” (p. 119) and ‘Just no more high horses, please. This is a war on foot.’” (p. 133) “The way the

terrorists in our time can be made to believe they are eternal if they die fighting for the cause of their ruler.” (p. 261)

Conventions

- **Detective:** Anil as a forensic anthropologist is an unconventional detective, but she fits the conventional profile of the detective as a loner who pursues justice and truth.
- **Isolated setting:** Sri Lanka may be a country, but it is isolated by the Government’s cone of silence and the west’s indifference. Ondaatje lyrically captures the various locations. The Sri Lankan setting is culturally captured by the frequent use of Sri Lankan words, the references to Buddhism and village life, and to its historical heritage. Culturally, this novel would speak to a people who have endured so much suffering because of war, and enables a western reader to comprehend the extent of the suffering.
- **Mystery:** Who is Sailor? How did he die? Who killed him? Will Anil solve the crime? Will there be justice and closure?
- **Crime:** The collective crime against humanity is unconventional.
- **Clues:** Forensic clues, traveling to various locations, the reconstruction of sailor’s head, interviewing villagers, etc.
- **Criminals:** An unconventional aspect as there are multiple perpetrators all committing crimes for a so-called cause.
- **Victims:** Multiple victims and the families of those who have been killed or abducted.
- **Closure:** There is an unexpected ending and no real closure as the crimes will not end. Solace and hope are found in the redemptive powers of art. The reader is warned from the beginning that there will be no justice: “Nobody at the Centre for Human Rights was very hopeful about it” (p. 16). “I see the poem or the novel ending with an open door.” Ondaatje

Values

Ondaatje rejects the war and aggression as he is disturbed by its impact on the lives of the innocent people who are ignored by nations. Their voices have been silenced and they have chosen passive acceptance so try to survive. He has stated that his core values are reconciliation, compassion and forgiveness. These are the values of a pacifist who rejects ardent ideology and the abuse of power.

“Our newspapers are full of official stories, and what the novelist is responsible for is something unhistorical, unofficial what goes on in private. That’s what interests me”
Ondaatje.

- **Truth:** Anil relentlessly pursues truth despite personal danger, but Sarath has come to realise how truth can be distorted, manipulated and hijacked by those in power, “Sometimes law is on the side of power not truth” (p. 44), and “Sarath had seen truth broken into suitable pieces and used by the foreign press alongside irrelevant photographs” (p. 156). There is a vast difference between public and private truth. Public truth can be distorted and private truth has multiple variations for individuals, “Truth bounced between gossip and vengeance” (p. 54). “Most of the time in our world, truth is just an opinion” (p. 102). “The truth can be like a flame against a lake of petrol.” (Sarath)

Ondaatje: The truth! One of the things I wanted to get at was that we in the West have a tradition of believing that there are always answers, always solutions. American

foreign policy is based on that belief. You can bomb your way to victory if you want, or you can bomb your way to having your truth accepted in another country. I think that one of the important things that comes up in Asian writing is that sometimes you can have tragedy and light simultaneously, tragedy and almost comedy simultaneously. There's an odd kind of balance. It's a terrible thing to admit to or to accept, but there is an acceptance of it. Truth sometimes can be, you know, as dangerous as falseness.

- **Pacifism:** Acts of violence are viewed by Ondaatje as destructive and dehumanising for all players. “It is much more difficult to be a pacifist than it is to be a man of action...Pacifism, reconciliation, forgiveness are easily mocked and dismissed words. But only those principles will save us” Ondaatje.
- **Natural world:** Nature is at odds with war. The natural world with its beauty can heal, but humanity ignores nature and commits unnatural acts. “He would lie there conscious of the noises from the surrounding ocean of trees. Farther away were the wars of terror, the gunmen in love with the sound of their shells, where the main purpose of war had become war” (p. 98). Nature and its beauty continue to exist despite such the horror of war. “For four hundred years the unheard throat calls of birds. The hum of some medieval bee motoring itself into the air” (p. 190).
- **Compassion:** Caring for others is paramount in this novel. The doctors despite hardship and danger stay to help the victims of war. Gamini works long, arduous hours to ease suffering and save lives. Ondaatje is briefly critical of the west that showed no compassion towards the Sri Lankans.
- **Communication:** The victims of this civil war are too afraid to speak; they have been silenced by fear and violence, “If a father protested a son’s death, it was feared another family member would be killed” (p. 56). Sailor symbolises all of the dead who were victims of such a senseless war. Giving Sailor a name would recognize all those who died, “Who was he? The representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest” (p. 56). “One victim can speak for many victims” (p. 176). The west has marginalised and silenced the Sri Lankan people.
- **Local narratives:** Ondaatje values and privileges a range of small, local stories, the vignettes of village life that force the reader to remember what life is really about, “A quietly heroic life remembered in a few such stories” (p. 214). Through polyphony many voices are heard.

It seems essential for us to recognize that no historical event, or no historical situation, or even human or love story can rely on just one voice or one spokesperson” Ondaatje, 2001.

“In many ways I'm very glad it's there, because politically nowadays, today especially, it seems essential for us to recognize that no historical event, or no historical situation, or even human or love story can rely on just one voice or one spokesperson. And, you know, especially in this big, intricate and communal world of politics today, and in Sri Lanka for example, you cannot rely on just Anil to tell the truth, or just Gamini, or just Sarath, or just Palipana, or just Ananda, or whoever it is, to have the only voice. Because everything is shaded: one person's tragedy is another person's comedy or not comedy but something else that is not that serious. So it seems to me that a novelist has somehow, either through various narrators or through suggestion or something else, or through juxtaposition or collage, to suggest the complexity of

any moment. It's the morality of cubism in a way, to allow us to see the face four different ways simultaneously Ondaatje.

Popularity of Crime Writing

- **Mystery:** Readers will always be fascinated by mystery. As Anil has become so attached to Sailor and she is so determined to solve the mystery of his death and the identity of his killers, the reader is focused on uncovering the truth. However, the reader is also fascinated by the mystery surrounding some of the characters such as Ananda and Gamini.
- **Sleuth:** Anil is a fascinating strong female sleuth with an interesting past, “She knew herself to be, and was known by others, as a determined creature” (p. 67). She is alienated by circumstance and by choice. The reader is intrigued by her dysfunctional relationships with men, and her displacement in America as a foreigner and in Sri Lanka as an expatriate.
- **The Investigation:** Readers are morbidly fascinated by the accretion of detailed scientific forensic clues, such as how Anil was able to discover Sailor’s occupation, how he died and his origins, “The burning hadn’t reached the head, so the frontal, orbital and lacrimal plates were smooth, the knit marks on the skull tight” (p. 75).
- **Setting:** The setting is lyrically detailed by Ondaatje, such as at the Grove of Ascetics with the epigraphist Palipana or graphically and bluntly conveyed, such as in the hospital scenes. Ondaatje powerfully employs omission in some scenes so that the reader used their imagination to evoke images of simple village life interrupted and destroyed by war.
- **Crime:** The dark side of humanity fascinates readers. The terrible crimes in this novel are morbidly fascinating as they did happen. Ondaatje uses the names of actual victims: “Prabath Kumara, 16. 17th November 1989. At 3.20 a.m. from the home of a friend” (p. 43). The crimes are objectively described inducing the reader to use their imagination. What is even more confronting about these crimes is that they are still occurring around the world, “The problem up here is not the Tamil problem, it’s the human problem” (p. 245).



The Real Inspector Hound

“It’s a whodunit, man!” (Birdboot P. 7)

The Form

This post-modern, playful parody of the Golden Age cosy confronts us with the clichéd conventions and stereotypical characters of the genre. The use of the mirror, the explicit stage directions and the merging of the two plays challenge the audience to ponder why we are drawn to this genre and how even when it is entertaining and humorous we cannot ignore the darker side of humanity.

The Writer

Stoppard was born in 1937 in Czechoslovakia. At seventeen, he became a journalist, and in 1960, Stoppard left newspaper work to write critical articles and his first play. Between 1962-1963 he worked as a theatre critic in London for *Scene* magazine under the by-line William Boot. This was the name of the journalist in Evelyn Waugh’s biting satire *Scoop*. He believed anyone called *Boot* shows certain aggressiveness in trying to shape his life. Stoppard was also fascinated with the name *Moon* – someone who is more kicked against than kicking.

Stoppard’s writing is influenced by Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* that according to Stoppard liberated the writing of plays as he used minimal words and exposed the lack of communication in modern society - “*Prufrock* (a poem by Eliot) and Beckett are the twin syringes of my diet, my arterial system.”

The Writing

The play deliberately takes the form of an entertaining, melodramatic parody of the popular and very familiar British cosy. “*Parody is repetition, but repetition that includes difference. It is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways*” (Linda Hutcheon, 1985, *A Theory of Parody*).

Stoppard’s play parodies the crime fiction genre, particularly Agatha Christie’s long running play *The Mousetrap* - the country house whodunit mystery – because it has become so familiar and popular. The genre has become so established that modern audiences are familiar with its conventions; therefore Stoppard’s parody is assured of success. The refinement of the genre enables writers like Stoppard to play with the conventions and even target the sub-genres that modern crime fiction appropriates.

...the author has taken the trouble to learn from the masters of the genre. He has created a real situation, and few will doubt his ability to resolve it with a startling denouement. Certainly that is what it so far lacks, but it has a beginning, a middle and I have no doubt it will prove to have an end (Birdboot p. 31).

Stoppard employs the stock features of melodrama: slapstick humour, hyperbole, stereotypical characters and double entendre to effectively mock the conventions of the cosy.

The play within a play intrigues the audience with the opening featuring critics as members of the audience, and if Stoppard’s stage directions are followed, a large mirror reflecting members of the audience. Stoppard stated: “Dislocation of an audience’s assumptions is an important part of what I like to write.”

The second play running parallel with the cosy until the two plays collide with the ringing of the real phone on stage, parodies the language and actions of theatre critics. Stoppard as a former critic and now a playwright was familiar with the powers of a critic who could make or break an actor or shorten a play's season. Despite this knowledge, the parody is not meant to be taken too seriously. The critics are a convenient way to mock the crime fiction genre. *"I don't want to put words into your mouth but a word from us and we could make her"* (Birdboot p. 8).

The Crime and the Context

Stoppard aware of the popularity and longevity of Christie's play, playfully questions its place in a chaotic modern world in the midst of the futile Vietnam War in the late 1960's, and transforms the genre into a melodramatic comedy.

The country house always had a number of guests who were all revealed as having a motive to commit the crime. The standard guest list included: a socialite, a cad, a military man, an elderly, rich harridan, a long lost relative (not revealed until later), a husband to one of the ladies, a butler, a housekeeper, and eventually a detective who experienced difficulty reaching the isolated manor house.

Mrs Drudge happens to always overhear the various characters threatening to kill someone: Mrs. Drudge: *"...Lady Muldoon and her houseguests, are here cut off from the world, including Magnus, the wheelchair-ridden half-brother of her ladyship's husband Lord Albert Muldoon..."* (p. 11) Hound: *"One of us ordinary mortals thrown together by fate and the elements, is the murderer!"* (p. 30) *"Sometimes I dream that I've killed him"* (Moon p. 23).

The audience is aware that a murder has already occurred because they can see the body under the coach. This mystery murder is followed by the death of Simon, the cad in the play.

The Detective

The title with its emphasis on 'real', questions from the start the role of the detective. The detective in Christie's world after rationally and logically accreting the clues could solve the mystery and restore order. In the world of the 1960's with the Vietnam War and political unrest, the world is not rational.

The Inspector who is masquerading as a detective enters the play wearing swamp boots and carrying a foghorn. He is pursuing a madman who has made a "beeline for Muldoon Manor." (Christie's Detective Sergeant Trotter arrives on skis in the middle of a snowstorm.) What disconcerts the audience is that the detective is the killer and the crime is not neatly solved.

The absence of a detective subverts and mocks the conventions of the British cosy that relied on the detective to restore order and ensure that there is justice.

The Investigation

With no detective at the start of the play, there is no investigation with the exception of the critics and the audience who try to predict who has killed the body on the stage and Simon.

Ideas

- **Desires and Dreams:** Stoppard playfully exposes the dangers of pursuing our deepest desires and wishes. Birdboot considers it his right to seduce young actresses: “I took her to dinner simply by way of keeping au fait with the world of the paint and motley.” Moon’s envy and desire to be the main theatre critic are exaggerated in the play: “Sometimes I dream that I killed him.” Ironically his desires are ruthlessly pursued by his third stinger Puckeridge who realises his ambitions through murder: “Puckeridge...you cunning bastard.”
- **Hypocrisy:** Birdboot justifies his affairs with the actresses, and boasts about his ability to launch the career of an actress: “And should she as a result, care to meet me over a drink, simply by way of er – thanking me, as it were” (Birdboot).

Conventions

- **The Country House Setting:** Christie regularly set her stories in the country in an isolated manor. The occupants were usually isolated from the outside world by a snowstorm or a thick fog. The house reflected the wealth of the upper class owner. In *The Real Inspector Hound* the isolation of the house is grossly exaggerated. The guests are isolated by rising water and thickening fog, and surrounded by treacherous swamps: “this strangely inaccessible house” (Simon p. 12) “The fog is very treacherous around here...” (Mrs. Drudge p. 12).
- **Multiple suspects:** As with the cosy, everyone is a suspect until the real killer is exposed.
- **The Sleuth:** The detective was usually clever and astute. He or she would expose the true identity of the guests and reveal any secrets. In the play, the detective is the killer, and the audience are the actual detectives.
- **Clues and Red Herrings:** The clues were usually revealed in the dialogue of the characters so the reader or audience had to be reading or listening carefully.
- **The subversion:**
- **Clues:** In *The Real Inspector Hound*, the characters reveal their own motives. Simon is the main red herring.

Values

The British cosy privileged the values of integrity, honesty and justice, but Stoppard is writing for an audience in the late 1960’s who have been inundated through the media with shocking images of the Vietnam War. Thus, the values conveyed in the play are the importance of:

- **Communication:** The Theatre of the Absurd movement that influenced Stoppard’s writing satirically exposed the lack of communication between individuals in famous plays such as *Waiting for Godot*. The critics in the play talk but they do not communicate. Their egocentric, asinine comments are hollow and meaningless. The banter of the characters on stage is equally spurious and superficial.
- **Integrity and Honesty:** Neither the characters or the critics reveal integrity. Birdboot prides himself on his ability to deceive others, and he uses his role as a critic and his power to make or break an actor to seduce young actresses.
- **Truth and Honesty:** Stoppard’s later plays are political and focused on exposing the absence of truth in society. In this play, Stoppard satirises reality and truth. Birdboot prides himself on his lies, and the characters in Muldoon Manor have resorted to lies to hide their motives and questionable behaviour.

Popularity of Crime Writing

The popularity of the genre has enabled Stoppard in his post modern play to parody the well established and clichéd conventions. Stoppard is having a riotous time with this play, lampooning at will. He playfully emphasises the clichés, and self-reflexively mocks his own role as a playwright: “*within the austere framework of what is seen to be on one level a country-house weekend...the author has given us - yes, I will go so far - he has given us the human condition.*” The play was planned as entertainment – a “nuts and bolts comedy” (Stoppard).

The Skull Beneath The Skin

“I think that’s one of the attractions of the genre, that it does bring order out of disorder...It affirms the sanctity of life, however unpleasant that character may be, and it confirms our belief that we live in a moral and compassionate universe. And that we can have some justice, even if it is the imperfect justice of men” P.D. James.

The Form

P.D. James has created a hybrid crime fiction novel that blends the conventions of gothic horror and the cosy. She metafictionally mocks the crime genre.

The Writer

P.D. James is attracted to the detective story by “the catharsis of carefully controlled terror, the bringing of order out of disorder, the reassurance that we live in a comprehensible and moral universe and that, although we may not achieve justice, we can at least achieve an explanation and a solution”.

The Writing

P.D. James, like Stoppard, mocks the conventions of the cosy: “one of those thirties murder mysteries, the sort where the ingénue is called Bunty, the hero is Clive and all the men wear long tennis flannels and keep dashing in and out of french windows” (p. 15). James even has a dig at Christie: “Reviewing Agatha Christie at the Vaudeville is a poor preparation for the real thing” (p. 194). “It sounds like the chapter heading for one of those thirties snobbish thrillers” (p. 241). “We mustn’t forget the butler. I regard the butler as the gratuitous insult on the part of fate” (p. 209).

She draws on the conventions of the cosy and the gothic horror genre. The isolated setting with the Victorian mansion that has gothic features marries the two genres in this hybrid text.

Setting, important in any work of fiction, is particularly so in a detective story. It establishes atmosphere, influences plot and character and enhances the horror of murder, sometimes by contrast between the beauty and outward peace of the scene and the turbulence of human emotions (P.D. James, <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pdames/guardian.html>).

The characters in *The Skull Beneath the Skin* are very deliberately drawn with detail. Unlike many other cosies, James’ characters are not stereotypes, “The characters should be real human beings, each of whom comes alive for the reader, not pasteboard people to be knocked down in the final chapter.”

One key feature of her writing is closure. James claims that as modern times are chaotic, confronting and disconcerting, she deliberately brings some closure to her novels, “in an age when we are forever seeing images of death on a huge scale, deaths that we can do nothing about, it is comforting to know that our society still makes such a concentrated effort to bring murderers to justice”.

The Crime and the Context

The crime occurs in a closed community with a limited number of suspects on the island of Courcy that is an appropriate setting for the cosy genre. The novel features a number of distorted relationships where the family no longer exists as a cohesive unit. This reflects the context of the early 1980’s when the individual was becoming more important than the community and the family unit. It was a period of uncertainty when unemployment was increasing and the Thatcher government in Great Britain was dismantling the welfare system.

Cordelia has been employed by Sir George Ralston to protect his wife, the actress Clarissa Lisle who has been receiving death threats. Her murder is predictable but the fact that it was accidental is not. The stepson that she taunted and tried to seduce accidentally murders her in a rage after she has been exceptionally cruel. Ambrose helps Simon cover-up Clarissa’s death, but he later kills Simon when he fears that he will expose them both.

Although James asserts the importance of closure and justice, this is not achieved; however, a semblance of order is restored.

The Detective

P.D. James has crafted an appealing and vulnerable detective. Cordelia Gray is the inexperienced private detective who inherited a small agency from her partner Bernie after he committed suicide. “How sweet she was, with that gentle, self-contained dignity” (p. 94). She is alone like Anil and Jeff with an uneasy past – she was placed in foster care by her Marxist father. “She guarded her privacy” (p. 54).

When Cordelia encounters her first murderer, she states, “I can’t believe that a human being could be so evil.” Her innocence and strong sense of justice and integrity mark her as an outsider in a corrupt and tainted world.

The Investigation

Cordelia rationally and purposefully searches for clues to solve the mystery of Clarissa’s potential murderer. James drawing on the cosy puzzle litters the pages of the novel with various clues and red herrings for the reader to discover the identity of the murderer before Cordelia solves the mystery.

When Clarissa is murdered, Cordelia becomes a suspect, and a male sergeant is brought in to solve the case, but it is Cordelia who intelligently uncovers discovers Ambrose’s involvement. James ironically entitles Part Four ‘The Professionals’.

Ideas

- **Evil:** Cordelia is shocked by the dark side of humanity that is capable of so much evil: *I can’t believe that a human being could be so evil. What is the use of making the world more beautiful if the people who live in it can’t love one another?”*

"I don't remember when it began, but I knew the facts of death before I knew the facts of life. There never was a time when I didn't see the skull beneath the skin."

- **Egocentricity:** Clarissa's selfishness and cruelty shocks Cordelia who finds it difficult to work as her private investigator. "Clarissa doesn't understand about guilt" (p. 87). Clarissa has made many enemies through her thoughtless and self-centred behaviour. Her assistant Tolly is not informed that her only child is dying because Clarissa cannot bear to lose her dresser during a performance. Her treatment of her stepson is inconsistent and he is aware that she only adopted him because she believed that he could prove to be amusing and potentially a gifted musician:

Simon was supposed to be a talented pianist. Probably Clarissa had seen herself splendidly cantilevered in one of the front boxes at the Royal Festival Hall while her prodigy, adoring eyes glancing upwards, took his triumphant bow. It must be disconcerting for her to be faced instead with moodiness and the physical gracelessness of adolescence (p. 36).

- **Fear of Death:** The title signifies our mortality and our fear of death. Clarissa continually focuses on dying, Ivo is dying from cancer, and Gorringe morbidly satisfies his fascination by surrounding himself with artefacts of death. "It's my death I'm afraid of" (Clarissa, p. 123), and "I don't remember when it began, but I knew the facts of death before I knew the facts of life. There never was a time when I didn't see the skull beneath the skin." One of the reasons for our fascination with crime fiction is our fear that we too could be a victim. James is aware of our need for justice and closure so that we can feel momentarily safe in the knowledge that there are people out there protecting us and ensuring that justice is done. "But in all societies there was an atavistic fear of the malevolent power of a secret adversary, working for evil, willing one to failure, perhaps to death" (p. 60).

Conventions

P.D. James in her novel *The Skull Beneath the Skin* deliberately subverts the conventions of the crime genre.

I've tried to use the well-worn conventions of the mystery and subvert them, stretch them, use them to say something true about my characters, about men and women and the society in which they live. The mystery is an artificial form, but then all fiction is an artificial form. All fiction is the rearrangement of the author's compulsions, visions, ideas in what the writer hopes is a compelling and logical form" (P.D. James, http://dir.salon.com/books/int/1998/02/cov_si_26int.html).

- **Isolated setting:** The isolated setting is at Sir Ambrose Gorringe's Victorian castle situated on a remote island – a setting typical of the gothic genre that James blends with the cosy genre. Gorringe collects morbid relics, such as the arm from a memorial statue of a dead child, and the island was a former POW camp for Germans. "It stood on the edge of the sea, almost as if it had risen from the waves, a castle of rose-red brick..." (p. 69). Although typically isolated, the setting could easily form the backdrop for a gothic horror text. "But terrible things have happened there!" (p. 25)
- **Detective:** James employs an inexperienced, young, innocent and female private investigator: "That it's an unsuitable job for a woman?" (p. 9)
- **Mystery:** The unravelling of the mystery is deliberately slow and staged: "No matter what, there should indeed be a mystery at the heart of the novel" (P.D. James).

- **Suspects:** Like most cosies, the characters are all suspects as they have been treated cruelly or unkindly by Clarissa or could benefit from her death.
 - Roma and Colin: ‘What would you get if she died?’
 - ‘I’m not sure. About eighty thousand I think. It could be more.’ (p. 43)
 - Simon: “Clarissa owed him something after all. It was she who had destroyed his parents’ marriage, enticed away his father, helped kill his mother through grief, left him as an orphan to discomforts, the vulgarities, the suffocating boredom of his uncle’s house” (p. 46).
 - Clarissa is aware that any one of the people she has worked with could be her potential killer: “it wasn’t pleasant to think that the person responsible might be one of that small group who would be with her on Courcy Island, that the eyes which would meet hers over the dining-table could be hiding such malignancy” (p. 60). “We are all here together, ten of us on this small and lonely island. And one of us is a murderer” (Cordelia, p. 277).

Values

- **Justice:** James explores the crimes of society and the resolution of these crimes through the rational and determined actions of Cordelia to demonstrate that order can be restored. Even though the reader may feel that Clarissa and Simon’s deaths were deserved, James asserts that murder is never justifiable: “It affirms the sanctity of life, however unpleasant that character may be, and it confirms our belief that we live in a moral and compassionate universe. And that we can have some justice, even if it is the imperfect justice of men” (P. D. James). Cordelia is faced with the dilemma at the end of the novel about whether to expose Ambrose’s evil she realises that he could easily thwart the law, but she chooses truth and justice. “She would tell the truth, and she would survive” (p. 371).
- **Altruism:** Cordelia’s kindness and selflessness are apparent from the opening of the novel. Despite running a struggling agency she continues to employ misfit characters. Her unselfishness is juxtaposed with Clarissa’s egocentric, uncaring attitude and behaviour.

Popularity of Crime Writing

P.D. James employs the popular intriguing puzzle with numerous clues and red herrings that readers enjoy unravelling. The setting and characters are described in great detail. She fulfils our desire for justice and closure in a modern world where chaos is disturbingly confronting:

...in an age when we are forever seeing images of death on a huge scale, deaths that we can do nothing about, it is comforting to know that our society still makes such a concentrated effort to bring murderers to justice.

The critics have forecast the death of the classical detective story at every decade, but the form remains remarkably resilient. There are the attractions of a strong plot, a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. There is the challenge of a puzzle for those who like following clues. The detective story, like other forms of crime novel, provides vicarious excitement and danger. But there are other interesting psychological reasons. The classical detective story is rather like the modern morality play. It can provide catharsis, a means by which both writer and reader exorcise irrational feelings of anxiety or guilt. The basic moral premise, the sanctity of life, is also an attraction as is the solution of the plot at the end of the book. The classical

detective story affirms our belief that we live in a rational and generally benevolent universe (P.D.James, <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pdjames/faq.html#three>).

Practice Questions

1. “Crime writing reflects its context and times. Is this true of the detective in the crime genre?”

Account for the constants and differences in the representation of the detective in at least two of your prescribed texts and at least two of your own choosing.

2. Present a proposal for a crime text in any medium. In your proposal include: the genre, form, audience, setting, crime, detective character, values and conventions.

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- http://www.boredofstudies.org/wiki/Module_A:_The_Skull_beneath_the_Skin
- Genre theory: <http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/TC510/ChandlerGenreTheory.pdf>
- <http://evolutionarymedia.com/cgi-bin/wiki.cgi?GenreTheory,template.html>

Imaginative Responses

Crime writing is about the craft and artistry of composing. Thus, when you craft your text you need to consider:

Form and medium: The conventions and features

Audience: Register, voice, crime and values

Purpose: Entertain, inform, social issues, etc.

Genre: True Crime, Hard-boiled, hybrid, etc.

Context: Your own personal values, attitudes, perceptions and how you feel about the times you are living in

Conventions: The constants such as the lone detective and the differences such as the unconventional sleuth

Ideas: What do you want to say about society and humanity?

Plot: The conflict, rising action, denouement (if any), the twist and turns, the mystery and the use of contrast

Structure: Flashback, multiple perspectives, circular, parallel stories, multiple perspectives, etc.

Setting: Time, place, the social, cultural, political and historical context and atmosphere

Characterisation: Crime, detective, criminals, etc.

Language: Imagery, dialogue, figurative devices, humour, contrast, etc.

Values: Truth, justice, honour, integrity, etc.

The focus is on the **crime and its investigation** that has its roots in the traditional detective story. Therefore, you need to consider in your writing:

The nature of the crime: Consider what crimes are especially relevant and fascinating to a modern audience in the 21st century, such as: terrorism, corporate crime, guns smuggling, domestic violence, kidnapping, etc.

The Investigation: The tools, the methods and what hinders or facilitates the investigation.

The detective: His or her ethics, values, background, biases, perspectives, etc.

Suggestions

1. You will be judged on your writing skills so do not neglect structure, paragraphing, syntax, imagery and form. Establish an evocative setting with descriptive writing, and centralise your writing around a key concept or ideas. The 'Extension Notes from the Marking Centre' stated that better responses *"used clever structures and demonstrated a highly developed ability to use vocabulary and language appropriate to the characters, world and context they had created."*

As the game progressed, Jayne found herself mesmerized by its rhythms. It was as if the world had shrunk to the size of the card table, amplifying the shuffle of the cards, the clink of the chips and the whisper of the man from Brunei's money as the wad in front of him shrunk and the pile in front of her grew. For the first time, she understood the allure of the game. Even knowing it couldn't last, winning made her feel powerful. Her opponent grunted to indicate his calls, cleared his throat loudly with each new loss and drank noisily from the bottles of Heineken on the trolley.

2. You must reveal understanding and knowledge of the genre and its conventions of form and styles. Unless you are setting out to write a parody, be aware that it is all too

easy to write a clichéd response. The 2005 *Extension Notes from the Marking Centre* stated that the better imaginative responses “*illustrated an understanding of the conventions and also displayed originality and freshness in the use of the provided text and the exploration of the genre.*” The 2006 notes observed that “*Better responses were often characterised by layered and experimental narrative form, sometimes in a hybrid of genres.*” In 2007 the feedback was that “*Many narratives used plots which were clichéd, predictable or poorly developed appropriations of either the prescribed texts or canonical-related texts.*” In 2010 better responses “*were innovative in structure and concept and took risks with both narrative voice and plot that were appropriate for the elective and clearly illustrated the central concerns of the module. They were engaging, often witty and used language in an original, imaginative and insightful manner.*”

3. Demonstrate understanding of how a genre reflects its times, culture, attitudes and values. The 2010 feedback stated that stronger responses “*demonstrated a deep understanding of the genre as an ongoing reflection of society and its relationship with those who transgress its laws.*”
4. Focus on crafting an interesting structure. The 2010 feedback observed that better responses “*were innovative in structure and concept and took risks with both narrative voice and plot.*”
5. Introduce the element of mystery employing tension, rising action, authentic dialogue and striking language features.
6. You could employ a motif or symbol that binds the response such as a smouldering cigarette, reflections in mirrors and dark glasses, eyes or a suitcase.
7. Effectively create key players such as your sleuth using detailed descriptions. Focus on creating an authentic voice for your characters. The 2007 Notes from the Marking Centre notes that “*Better responses created convincing voices for their hard-boiled or intellectual sleuths. They frequently used the voice of a female protagonist in sophisticated ways often to subvert reader expectations and thereby challenge the conventions, ideas and values of the genre.*”
8. Most crime fiction writers create a detailed, powerful setting. Revisit the settings in a variety of texts such as Marele Day’s *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender* where the city of Sydney is evocatively captured and transformed into a character in the novel and use language features and form effectively:

She’d been a very sickly child, poxy and plague-ridden (referring to the early colonial days). But she’d grown strong, like a mushroom on a dung heap. Like an exotic mushroom I’d once seen at Gary’s. A beautiful crimson fungus had sprung out of the ground like a spidery flower. But in its centre was a dark foetid substance that smelled exactly like human excrement.

9. Create a key concept or idea in your text that is central to the narrative. This focus could be used to reflect the times, attitudes, culture and values of your text. The 2007 Notes from the Marking Centre stated that “*Better responses also explored contextual issues and values such as justice, resolution for both victim and society and the nature of justice and morality.*” E.g.

Detective Piari Roberts entered the scene, marching towards the police barricade, displaying his badge as if it were a boarding pass to enter onto a turbulent flight. He enjoyed his power, but he was not blinded by it. He was a very dark young man, typical of a Murri; however, the evidence of his Caucasian heritage could not be hidden. He had deeply hazel eyes, and striking blonde hair streaked with the odd dark strand. Typical of his total appearance: a conflict between light and dark. White and Black.

10. **FOCUS** on the set question and use it to shape and guide your imaginative response.

Preparation

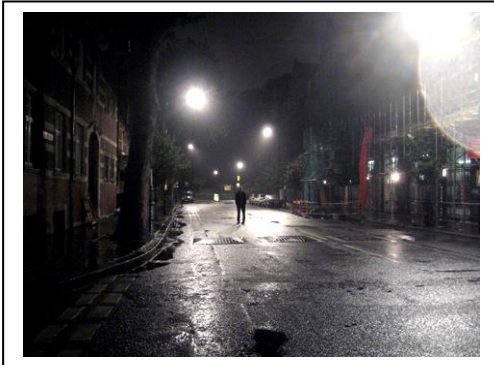
The 2007 Notes from the Marking Centre stated “*The authentic voice of characters and the convincing descriptions of settings characterised better responses which were thereby demonstrating a sophisticated ability to consider the conventions, ideas and values of their genres.*” With this in mind begin to develop the following features:

1. **The Concept/Idea:** Select two or three key ideas or concepts that could be used in an imaginative response, such as:
 - Crime does pay
 - Justice and morality
 - Loss of innocence
 - Peer pressure
 - Duality
 - Morality
2. **The Form and Medium of Production:** If you elect to write a play or a short story or use any other form this will have a direct impact on your choice of language techniques and your audience.
3. **Setting:** Play with two or more settings to orient and re-orient your reader and establish a world for your characters focusing on **showing** not telling through imagery appealing to the senses especially sound, colour, touch and smell, strong verbs rather than too many adjectives, contrast, and a variety of sentence structures. You could use:
 - A cityscape
 - A narrow alleyway
 - The suburb you live in
 - An amusement park such as Luna Park or Dreamworld
 - A playground at dusk
4. **The Crime:** Decide what the crime will be remembering your audience and times. In this current climate you take a leaf out of Flanagan’s novel *The Unknown Terrorist* or focus on a crime from the past that continues to haunt modern audiences.
5. **The Investigation:** This will be shaped by your choice of sleuth, setting and crime.
 - You could start your text at the end of the investigation and then use a flashback structure.
 - You could focus on what thwarts the investigation and its twists and turns.
6. **The Detective or Sleuth:** You may opt to subvert this convention and use an individual who is not a detective. They could be the killer or the victim or even the weapon!
7. **The Characters:** You can subvert the conventions through your characters. Focus on representing character and their values:
 - Voice
 - Eyes
 - Facial expression
 - Body language
 - Dress
 - Talismans such as a pocket watch or a wrist band
 - Gestures
 - Relationships

- How they move in their world
 - The objects in their home, office, etc that represent who they are or what they have left behind.
8. **The Structure:** Play with the narrative structure and vary the length of your paragraphs and sentences. You could:
- Incorporate different perspectives
 - Use the third person but employ stream of consciousness so that the reader gets inside the head of your character
 - Challenge the reader's assumptions by subverting the narrative structure such as by having no resolution.
9. **The Values:** Select the core values that will underpin your text. These values could be the beliefs of the sleuth or could have been compromised by society or the criminal.

Activities

- To prepare for writing under pressure compose a **50-word** Crime story with a motif and key concept! Try using a mirror and the concept of duality.
- Find a series of images on Google and use them as a stimulus for writing.



- Use a film clip or an instrumental piece as a stimulus for writing. You could take one of the lines from the film and incorporate it into your writing such as Joker's line from *Batman: The Dark Knight*: "After this there is no going back."
- Read the local and world news and select a crime that you find fascinating. Weave this into a short story and select who would be the best sleuth to investigate this crime.
- Choose an event that interests you or has moved you, and base a story on it.
- A powerful weapon for a crime writer is the "what if" question. Imagine that something happened in your life and in your suburb. This is the basis of the crime genre. That instant between order and chaos, when everything changes, and characters walk on the edge.

"The genesis of writing was an image of two men following another man down a Tokyo street. If you think about it, an image like that is subject to many interpretations; for me, it could only mean that the first two were assassins, the lone man their target..." (Barry Eisler, *Rain Fall* 2005).
- Focus on creating an evocative setting. Remember to use the senses: what do you hear, see and feel, and what happens to this scene when one or more things suddenly change? Incorporate imagery, symbolism and use effective figurative devices. Remember that verbs are powerful weapons.
- Show don't tell. Leave enough to the imagination of the reader so that they want to read more.

- Create characters who are real to the reader, who evoke an emotional response within the reader, and you create suspense because the reader will want to know what is going to happen to these people. Think of the character in Dexter! Make your criminal charming and give them a flaw just like your detective.
“The main trick is to get inside the character's head and to try to present him as fully human. No one looks in the mirror and sees a bad guy; we all have our justifications and rationalisations” (Barry Eisler, Rain Fall 2005).
- Play with dialogue – this can be a real weakness in writing. Use it to develop characterisation progress a section of the narrative and express values

Texts of own choosing

“explore, analyse and critically evaluate a range of other examples of this genre from different contexts and media...” (NSW BOS Stage 6 English Syllabus).

“They explore the diversity within the crime writing genre in a range of contexts and media” (2009-2012 Stage 6 Prescriptions Document).

*“They should be discouraged from having **only two** ‘other texts’ to choose from as those texts may not be useful for the specific focus of the question. It was evident in the more sophisticated responses that candidates had individually and carefully selected ‘other texts’ that would develop their argument in an effective manner. These responses displayed diversity and freshness in their originality and a truly personal engagement with the elective” (2007 Notes from the Marking Centre).*

Suggestions

1. Select texts that enable you to make meaningful connections with your prescribed texts. This could mean comparing and contrasting the sleuths and the values, culture, times and attitudes in the texts, and what this means for the crime genre. E.g. The cosy grew out of a middle class society with conservative values in England that appreciated the intellectual puzzle, whereas this would have not worked in an supposedly egalitarian American society that prided itself on equal opportunity in the pursuit of the American dream and was influenced by the frontier western with its focus on the lone hero confronting the darker elements of society.
2. The question must drive and shape your response in the HSC examination. The 2008 Notes from the Marking Centre stated that *“An ability to engage with the given question is crucial and reference to the key terms of the questions should be more than tokenistic. Better responses not only considered the key terms of the question, but structured arguments in an interesting, original, perceptive and/or engaging manner.”*
3. Ensure that you develop a strong line of argument or thesis that is connected to the set question. Your thesis should be developed throughout the response and supported and challenged judicious textual support. *“In the better responses, candidates maintained a strong engagement with the question throughout, constructing clear and balanced arguments supported by judiciously selected textual evidence” (2008 Notes from the Marking Centre).* The thesis enables you to integrate your exploration of the texts. The 2008 Notes from the Marking Centre stated *“In English Extension 1, synthesis is the key to a sophisticated response.”*
4. Refer to at least **TWO** other related texts. If you have a **range of texts** to draw upon, then the HSC question should be accessible, and you will be able to “present a complex and detailed analysis” of crime writing.

5. Choose texts from a diverse range of mediums of production. E.g. A postmodern short story, a foreign film, a true crime novel and a computer game or a television show.
6. Select your own texts rather than using the same texts as your class as this will invite personal engagement and original and perceptive interpretations. Outcome 4 requires you to be involved in independent research, finding texts of **YOUR OWN** choosing.

Many crime writers continue to feature a flawed detective who is a loner and driven by a strong belief in justice and truth.

Rear Window

Jeff is not your conventional sleuth or a loner by choice. Instead he is a photographer who has become a voyeur who addresses the boredom of being confined to a wheelchair because of a broken leg, by spying on his neighbours through his rear window. Like Anil, he fears commitment and intimacy. He is living in a frozen state until he is released by Lisa. When he is convinced that his neighbour has killed his wife, he sets out to expose the murder.

Anil's Ghost

Anil, like Marlowe, is a loner. She formed a relationship with the married Cullis knowing that the relationship is doomed. She determinedly pursues justice and truth despite realising the consequences. Anil keeps others and the reader at a distance.

The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency

Precious Ramotswe's warmth and love for Africa are endearing. She has no family, but she is not a loner. Her world is rich with friends, such as Matekoni. Like Anil, she is pursues truth and justice for others: "They are my people, my brothers and sisters. It is my duty to help them to solve the mysteries of their lives. That is what I am called to do" (p. 4]).

House

The doctor on the trail of disease and probable cause is an eccentric, flawed outsider whose cynical and acerbic attitude and unconventional methods attract opposition and controversy.

Suggested Texts

Novels

Boris Akunin – *Special Assignments*: Eccentric Russian detective Erast Petrovich Fandorin uses his powers of detection to catch a brutal serial killer: “*He is cunning and calculating; he possesses a will of iron and he is exceptionally enterprising. What you see before you is not a madman, but a monster*” (2007, p.325)

Reed Arvin – *The Last Goodbye*: Court appointed attorney Jack Hammond is always in trouble in this legal thriller.

Andrea Camilleri - *The Sand Path* (2007)/*The Age of Doubt* (2008) - Light-hearted crime fiction about Sicilian Inspector Montalbano’s exploits.

Michael Chabon – *The Final Solution*: Cosy set in England during WWII featuring an ageing detective who resembles Sherlock Holmes investigating the disappearance of a Jewish boy’s parrot and a murder. “*He handled the grisly bit of evidence without hesitation or qualm. He had seen human beings in every state, phase and attitude of death: a Cheapside drunk tumbled, throat cut, headfirst down a stairway of the Thames Embankment, blood pooling in her mouth and eye sockets; a stolen child, green as a kelpie, stuffed into a storm drain....*” (2005, p. 35).

Michael Connelly – *The Narrows*: Los Angeles Harry Bosch private investigator tracks down the killer of his friend. “*Harry is an amalgamation of several real cops I knew as a police reporter plus aspects of fictional detectives – from both books and movies – that I have loved*” (2005, Connelly).

Marele Day – *The Disappearances of Madalene Grimaldi*: Hard-boiled Australian fiction featuring private investigator Claudia Valentine.

Gary Disher – *Chain of Evidence*: Detective Sergeant Ellen Destry investigates an abduction in a small, closed community in South Australia.

Umberto Eco - *Name of the Rose*: Set in the 1300s with a Franciscan monk detective with the name of William of Baskerville.

James Ellroy – *The Big Nowhere/Blood on the Moon*: Hard-boiled confronting crime fiction: “*I wanted to give people crime fiction on an epic, transcendental scale*” (J.Ellroy, 1998).

Ben Elton – (2007) *Chart Throb*: Satirical, postmodern crime fiction.

Janet Evanovich – *Two for the Money* & many more: Stephanie Plumb is a bumbling bounty hunter who stumbles into solving crimes: “*I have more freedom of language with mystery. Okay, so I have a trash mouth. I'm from Jersey, what can I say*’ (1999).

Jasper Fforde – *The Eyre Affair* & more: Literary detective Thursday Next stars in a series of post-modern crime fiction texts: “*The Minotaur had been causing trouble far in excess of his literary importance. First by escaping from the fantasy-genre PrisonBook Sword of Zenobians, then by leading us on a merry chase across most of fiction and thwarting attempts to recapture him*” (2004, *Something Rotten*, p. 1). See official site -

<http://www.thursdaynext.com/>

Richard Flanagan – *The Unknown Terrorist*: A confronting thriller set in Australia that uses the fear of terrorism in a post-911 world to drive this chilling tale of persecution and lies.

Karin Fossum – *The Indian Bride* (2006) – Norway’s queen of crime fiction’s new novel.

Mark Haddon – *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*: Christopher whose hero is Sherlock Holmes sets out to solve the mystery of who killed the dog next door. “*In a murder mystery novel someone has to work out who the murderer is and then catch them. It is a puzzle. If it is a good puzzle you can sometimes work out the answer before the end of the book.*”

Michael Gregorio – *A Visible Darkness* (2008): Set in 1808, this is the third whodunit featuring Prussian magistrate Hanno Stiffenii.

Carl Hiaasen – *Skinny Dip*: A satirical, quirky crime fiction text where the sleuth has been pushed overboard on a cruise liner by her husband. “*The \$13 million inheritance he’d dreamed of receiving had turned out to be a sadistic hoax. The wife he had tried to kill was still alive, and on her way to the police. The girlfriend he’d shot with similar intent had survived, and set him up for abduction. The man with whom he’d so profitably conspired had turned on him, and ordered him put down like a lame horse. Do I deserve this? He wondered. Really?*” (2004, p. 337).

Tony Hillerman - *The Sinister Pig, Skeleton Man*: The cases of Navajo tribal police officers in the southwest USA Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee provide insight into the cultural milieu of the Indian peoples of the Southwest, particularly the Navajo.

Peter Hoeg– *Miss Smilla’s Feeling For Snow*: Set in Copenhagen, this lyrical thriller’s sleuth is physicist Smilla Jaspersen. “*Tell us, they’ll come and say to me. So we may understand and close that case. They’re wrong. It’s only what you do not understand that you can come to a conclusion about. There will be no conclusion*” (1993, p. 410).

Arnaldur Indridason – *The Draining Lake* (2008): The water level of an Icelandic lake drops suddenly, revealing the skeleton of a man half-buried in its sandy bed in this modern thriller.

Victor Kelleher – *Storyman*: An Australian dark, hard-boiled story focusing on Private eye Rose Sutton’s investigation of the kidnapping of a child. “*That, after all, was how the old stories were supposed to end with Rumpelstiltskin destroyed, the wolf beheaded, the old witch roasted alive*” (1996, p. 393).

Natsuo Kirino – *Out*: A Japanese lurid and bloody thriller whose heroines chop up bodies.

Alexander McCall Smith – *The No.1 Ladies’ Detective Club*: Botswana’s Precious Ramotswe a private female detective investigates a variety of domestic mysteries and subtly exposes significant issues such as racism, chauvinism, the importance of local narratives and society’s flaws. “*I am Precious Ramotswe, citizen of Botswana, daughter of Obed Ramotswe who died because he had been a miner and could no longer breathe. His life was unrecorded; who is there to write down the lives of ordinary people?*” (2003, p. 213). “*There was so much suffering in Africa that it was tempting just to shrug your shoulders and walk away*” (2003, p.228).

John LeCarre – *A Most Wanted Man* (2008): Master of the spy thriller has created a confronting, angry novel that reflects the 21st century focus on terrorism and questions the immoral nature of the intelligence practices.

Shane Maloney – *Stiff & The Brush Off*: A very Australian crime fiction novel featuring sleuth Murray Whelan who works for the Minister for Industry: “*Perhaps I should begin by saying that this is not a sob story. It’s a cruel world, I know, and even in the just city a man can be stiff*” (1994, p. 1).

Andrew McGhan – *Last Drinks*: Australian novel that explores police corruption in QLD.

Andrew Masterson – *Death of the Author*: A dark, gritty postmodern thriller that features a poet who investigates the plagiarism of his poetry and plays with the conventions of crime fiction. “*He wanted to say: look, look at these poems. They were beautiful once, loved. Look what he’s done: shorn their heads, changed their faces, stuck pins in their bodies. Even if I put them back right they’ll still be scarred forever*” (2001, p. 38).

Henning Menkell – *Return of the Dancing Master*: A Swedish thriller.

Ian McEwan – *The Innocent*: Well-crafted spy thriller about the loss of innocence and how easy it is to cross the line. “*The contact with clean water was a reminder of another life.*”

Walter Mosley – *Devil in a Blue Dress, Six Easy Pieces, and Little Scarlet*: urban blacks and their close-knit culture have challenged the conventional mystery’s focus.

Marcia Muller – *A Wild and Lonely Place*: terrorism and the FBI: "The revolution began quietly. In 1977 Marcia Muller invaded the previous all-male domain of the hard-boiled private eye. Not many heard the first shots, but a decade later, the tough woman P.I. had become a publishing phenomenon. Sharon McCone...led the way for Sara Paretsky, and Sue Grafton." **Newsweek**

Tara Moss – *Split/Fetish/Covet/Hit/Know Your ABC's/Intuition*: Fast paced thrillers featuring sleuth Makedde Vanderwall who is a model studying to be a forensic psychologist– See her official site <http://www.taramoss.com.au/novels/index.php>: "Another thrilling ride...Moss is a gifted storyteller, able to control the suspense and give her characters authenticity."

Orhan Pamuk (2001) – *My Name is Red*: Nobel prize-winning postmodern murder mystery with multiple perspectives of the crimes set in historical Istanbul. *I am nothing but a corpse now, a body at the bottom of a well. Although I drew my last breath long ago and my heart has stopped beating, no one, apart from that vile murderer, knows what's happened to me. As for that wretch, he felt for my pulse and listened for my breath to be sure I was dead, then kicked me in the midriff, carried me to the edge of the well, raised me up and dropped me below. As I fell, my head, which he had smashed with a stone, broke apart; my face, my forehead and cheeks, were crushed; my bones shattered, and my mouth filled with blood.*

Orhan Pamuk – *Snow*

Sara Paretsky – *Fire Sale*: Private detective V.I. Warshawski and gritty Chicago-based mysteries.

Elliot Perlman – *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and *Three Dollars*: Dark, Australian hybrid texts that explore the human psyche and expose society's flaws of materialism, greed, prostitution and gambling. "Do not be mistaken, do not be blinded by the glare of the everywhere-lights, cruelly never not on. There is no warmth to them. It is a cold, brutish age" (2003, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 605).

Ellis Peters – *The Sanctuary Sparrow*: A medieval whodunit where Sleuth Brother Cadfael investigates the case of a suspected murderer.

Dorothy Porter – *A Monkey's Mask*: Narrative poetry with a troubled lesbian sleuth.

Alice Sebold – *The Lovely Bones*: The omniscient, posthumous narrator – the young victim of rape and murder – relays the story of the tragic consequences of crime. Certainly a powerful subversion of the genre, the novel contextually reflects Sebold's own experiences as a victim of rape. "My name was Salmon, like the fish; first name, Susie. I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973 (2004, p. 1)."

Sandra Scoppettone - *Gonna Take a Homicidal Journey*: Set in New York's Greenwich Village, Lauren Laurano mysteries feature a lesbian, computer savvy former FBI agent and now private detective.

Seamus Smyth – *Quinn*: a chilling Irish thriller seen through the eyes of the murderer Gerd Quinn. "What I'm saying is this: I had to make her believe she'd solved the Hassett case. Then, as I said, I had to make her pay for her own vanity. Demoralize her, ruin her...Neutralize her. Before she actually did come across a piece of evidence that might uncover the truth of it all. I couldn't have that, know what I mean?" (1999, p. 273)

Peter Temple – *The Broken Shore*: Australian crime fiction featuring the troubled Detective Joe Cashin.

Al Turello – *Wild Justice*: Public prosecutor Nick Milano investigates the death of his mate Aboriginal lawyer Johnny Bora.

Arthur.W. Upfield: Australian detective novels – Bonaparte – aboriginal detective Robert van Gulik, - *The Lacquer Screen*, *The Haunted Monastery* and *The Chinese Maze Mysteries*: Judge Dee is a Tang Dynasty sleuth with several wives. Chinese mystery has always focused on the quest for justice and especially punishment for evils committed. "At

home each of his wives had her own separate bedroom, and he either passed the night there or invited one to his own bedroom” (p. 12, *The Haunted Monastery*).

Fred Vargas – *Have Mercy on Us All*: French hard-boiled novel that uses crime fiction as a vehicle to expose contemporary France’s flaws.

R.D. Wingfield – *A Killing Frost* (2008): Another Detective Inspector Jack Frost mystery.

Qui Xiaolong – *Death of a Red Heroine*: Set in Shanghai in 1990, Chief Inspector Chen finds that he is in danger of being dismissed from his job and the party if he continues to investigate the death of a young woman: “*It was so politically complicated, this homicide case*” (2006, p. 459)

Graphic Novel

Max Payne – Sam Lake: A hard-hitting graphic novel that has become a popular computer game and film. Max is a New York policeman whose family is murdered by drug dealers.

Sam Noir: Ronan Holiday - Eric.A.Anderson (2007): A samurai detective with a trench coat!

Two Guns - Steve Grant – Pulp fiction about deception – violent fast paced action.

Sin City – Frank Miller – Noir, hard boiled fiction – violent and confronting.

Femme Noir - Christopher Mills & Joe Staton: A female private eye working the mean streets and bloody alleys of a city where crime and corruption are the status quo and the nights seem to last forever. She takes on the cases that no-one can solve and she exacts harsh, swift justice with a pair of pearl-handled automatics.

John Doe - Mark Waid – Detective Doe solves cold cases in this mini-series.

Non-Fiction

John Bryson – *Evil Angels* (1986): The case of Lindy Chamberlain.

Truman Capote – *In Cold Blood* (1966): A canonical work about the 1959 slaying of a Kansas farm family and the capture, trial and execution of the two killers.

James Ellroy – *Destination Morgue! L.A. Tales* (2004): a recounting of time Elroy spent observing Los Angeles’ Cold Case Unit, as its members attempted to solve a long-ago mystery: the murder of 16-year-old Stephanie Gorman in her family’s West L.A. home back in 1965 – “*You’ve got torchbearers. Three detectives and one chronicler. We want to know you. It’s a pursuit. It’s a likelier outcome than justice... We’re spinning our wheels. It doesn’t matter. We get glimpses. You’re twirling in your prom gown. Color us devoted. Color you gone.*”

John Grisham – *An Innocent Man* (2006): an account of Ron Williamson, who was wrongly convicted of murder in 1988 and spent 11 years on Oklahoma’s death row before advances in DNA technology proved him innocent.

Debi Marshall - *Killing For Pleasure: The Definitive Story of the Snowtown Murders* (2007)

Candice Sutton & Ellen Connolly – *Lady Killer* (2009): Covers the murder trial of convicted killer Bruce Burrell – “*the textbook criteria for a psychopath...cold, cunning, disregardful of social obligations*”

Robert Wainwright & Paola Totaro – *A Dangerous Mind* (2009) – The story of Martin Bryant Australia’s notorious mass murderer.

Films

Animal Kingdom (2010) – Explosive Australian crime drama exploring the tense battle between a criminal family and the police.

Batman – The Last Knight (2008)

Capote (2005) – An account of Capote’s research of the murder of a Kansas family.

Déjà Vu (2007) – A science fiction crime thriller.

Dirty Deeds (2002) – A bitingly humorous Australian film starring Bryan Brown.

Gone (2007) – A psychosexual Australian thriller.

Gone Baby Gone (2008) – A thought provoking, confronting film about the meaning of justice.

Hot Fuzz (2007) – A black, satirical comedy that delights you with its absurd twists and confronts you with its gratuitous violence.

Identity (2003) – dark psychological thriller with unexpected twists and turns.

In Bruges (2009) – twisted satirical thriller from the perspective of two likeable Irish assassins.

Inception (2010) – Postmodern pastiche of crime fiction and science fiction.

Jindabyne (2006) – Australian film that explores the issues of indifference and inaction.

Kill Bill Vol. 1 (2003) – A violent, absurdist tale of revenge with a strong, driven female lead.

Lantana (2001) - In the midst of a midlife crisis, detective Leon Zat (Anthony LaPaglia) investigates the disappearance of a prominent psychiatrist.

Max Payne (2008) – Based on a graphic novel: surreal, bloody and confronting.

Mystic River (2003) – Set in working class Boston, a cop struggles to solve the murder of his friend's daughter.

No Country for Old Men (2008) – Unpredictable, hard hitting crime fiction.

Noise (2007) – An Australian film about a serial killer.

Pulp Fiction (1994) – Tarantino's satirical and dark crime fiction film.

Sherlock Holmes (2010) – Guy Ritchie's engaging transformation of a flawed and sardonic Holmes.

Shutter Island (2010) – psychological thriller film directed by Martin Scorsese.

Sin City (2005) – A confronting surreal film whose hero Marv seeks to find who killed Goldie.

The Black Dahlia (2006) – Stylised, surreal dark film that features a seamy, ugly world of exploitation.

The Boys (1998) – Australian film starring David Wenham and Toni Collette about a Brett Sprague – an intelligent, malevolent, manipulative and violent character.

The Dancer Upstairs (2002) – South American hybrid hard-boiled, romance film featuring the idealistic policeman Agustin Rejas who is hired to track down terrorists.

The Departed (2006) – Scorsese's confronting, violent and blunt film that explores identity and deception.

The Inside Man (2006) – Spike Lee's hard-hitting thriller with an unexpected twist.

The Thin Blue Line (1998) – Documentary about the controversial and true story of the arrest and conviction of Randall Dale Adams for the murder of a Dallas policeman in 1976. This documentary, with its use of expressionistic re-enactments and interview material, is credited with overturning the conviction of Adams for the murder of Dallas police officer Robert Wood, a crime for which Adams was sentenced to death.

The Town (2010) - Set in a tough, working class Boston neighbourhood this film represents a bank robber in a sympathetic light.

The Watchmen (2009) – Based on the best-selling 1986/1987 comic series by Alan Moore.

Two Hands (1999) – Confronting and hard-hitting Australian film.

Wolf Creek (2005) - Australian film based on the backpacker murders.

Zodiac (2007) - the story of the hunt for a notorious serial killer known as "Zodiac" who haunted the San Francisco Bay Area during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Short Films

Looking for Joe (2006): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9hGibJwxuI> – Clever short animation.

Television Shows

Jonathan Creek (ABC)

Life on Mars

Memphis Beat

Sherlock (ABC)

Silent Witness (ABC)

Spooks (ABC)

Southland

Justified

True Detective

Breaking Bad

Death in Paradise

Short Stories

‘A Twist of Noir’: A collection of on-line short stories in the hard-boiled genre: <http://a-twist-of-noir.blogspot.com/>

Gary Disher – *Straight, Bent and Barbara Vine* – great collection of well written stories – especially the postmodern ‘Bent’ stories: *‘I can’t deny that they employ some of the conventions of crime fiction, but I also hope they bring the genre in from the margins a little by demonstrating its artistic possibilities and complexities’* (1997).

Flash Fiction (Online)

Flash Pan Alley: Flash crime fiction - <http://flashpanalley.wordpress.com/>

Tara Moss - *Psycho Magnet* (1998) - *“I pass a lamp post, then another, glad of the space between us. My side. Your side. Slowly my heart begins to relax, to unclench just a little, because he is not following. With that reassuring distance, I steal occasional glances, to see what he will do. He is walking on his course, not even looking my way, and my heart slows, adrenaline retreating.”* - Printed in full at

<http://www.taramoss.com.au/novels/psychomagnet.php>

‘Thriller Killers ‘n’ Chillers: Flash Crime Fiction and short stories on the net:

<http://thrillskillsnchills.blogspot.com/>

Crime Podcasts

Crime Wave.com: <http://crimewav.com/> - podcasts of crime fiction short stories and flash fiction.

Computer Games

Alone in the Dark – A violent, dark game.

Greystone – An interactive crime fiction game where you are the detective.

Max Payne – Pulp crime fiction *Payne* is a film-noir-inspired game about revenge that is dark and twisted.

Poetry

W.H. Auden - 'Detective Story' (1937),
<http://www.canadianpoetry.ca/cpjrn/vol32/diemert.htm>
 Sean O'Brien - *Ghost Train* (OUP, 1999)
 Sean O'Brien - The Genre: The Travesty of Justice,
<http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/archives/places/commissioned/obrien/>
 Steven Herrick – *Cold Skin* (2007) – Clever verse novel focused on revenge.
 BJ Omanson - *Hard Boiled Sonnets*, 2001, <http://www.scuttlebuttsmallchow.com/boiled.html>.

Resources

- <http://therapsheet.blogspot.com/> - great links to an extensive range of sites
- Crime Writers' Association of Australia, <http://www.nedkellyawards.com/index.html>
- Tara Moss, <http://www.facebook.com/notes.php?id=9504834878>
- Teach yourself crime, <http://www.crimefiction.co.uk/tych.htm>
- <http://www.freewebs.com/heavymetaltime/theskullbeneaththeskin.htm> - notes on *Skull Beneath the Skin*
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